U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR BLOG

Keep Workers Safe from Gender-Based Violence and Harassment

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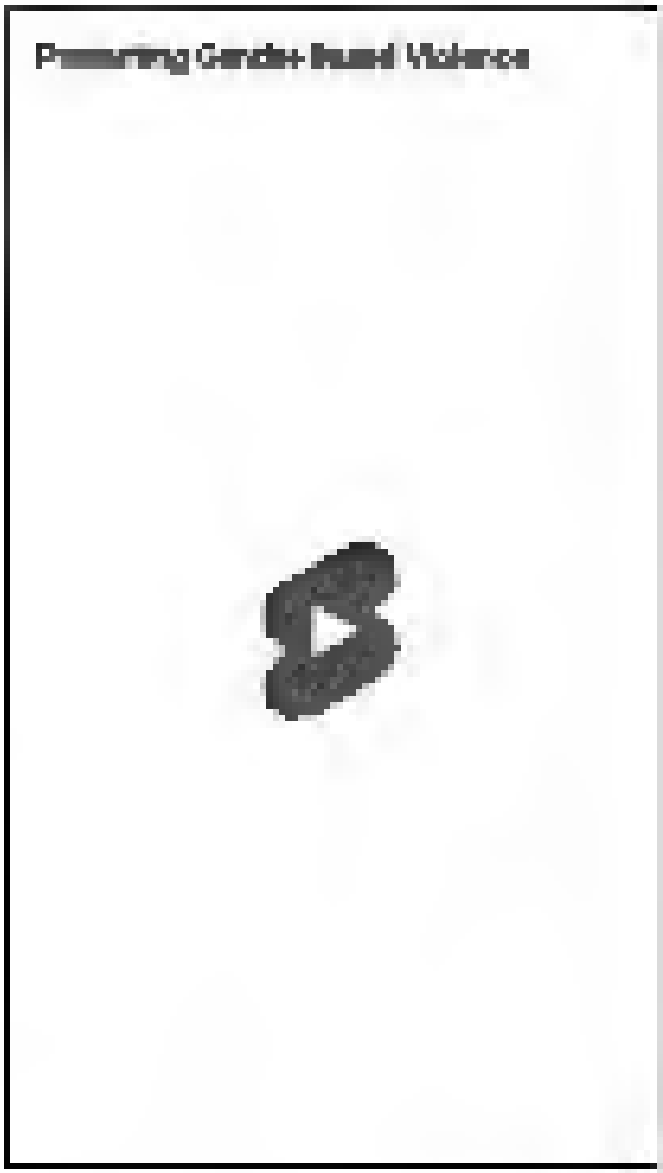

Gender-based violence and harassment is a workplace safety issue, as it affects the mental and physical health of workers, disrupts workplaces, impacts organizations, people of color and LGBTQ+ people. When it comes to safety, prevention is key. That's why during this year's global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the Department of Labor is elevating some of the ways employers can prevent gender-based violence and harassment and support victims and healthy workplaces.

Assess your workplace for risks

Employers can support worker safety by assessing the risk of gender-based violence and harassment both in their industry and in their specific workplace. As the first U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence notes, some indicators considered high-risk for gender-based violence and harassment include:

- male-dominated fields (e.g., trucking, construction, extractive field research)
- low-wage and tipped employment (e.g., hospitality, janitorial, agricultural, and migrant workers)
- conditions of isolation (e.g., domestic workers).

In recognition of this, the Department of Labor's new sample employment agreement for domestic workers, for example, recommends employers assess whether there is a potential risk of violence for the worker from someone in the home or neighborhood and develop a plan to mitigate this risk.

Review risks

Assessing your workplace for risks can help reduce the incidence of gender-based violence and harassment. For instance, when treating patients with known histories of violence or aggression you should assess the workplace to determine what safeguards are needed. Protections may include working in teams, panic buttons, and appropriate training. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed guidance to help employers identify how to protect workers from violence. In addition, the EEOC's Chart of Risk Factors for Harassment and Responsive Strategies can help identify ways employers can mitigate risks.

Implement a workplace policy

In consultation with workers and experts, employers can draft policies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and harassment tailored to their specific workplaces. The Women's Bureau recently highlighted some of the components of successful policies in construction, manufacturing, and clean energy jobs that can translate to other jobs. This includes ensuring that a zero-tolerance policy prohibiting gender-based violence and harassment that is widely communicated and accessible to all. It also includes establishing a process for reporting concerns that includes support for those impacted, protection from retaliation for reporting, active review of potential root causes, and clear consequences for gender-based violence, harassment and retaliation.

Provide regular training

Employers can also help prevent gender-based violence and harassment in their workplaces by providing training that helps workers of all levels understand what it is and how it impacts the world of work. Training is more effective when it is provided regularly, required for all workers and supervisors and co-created by workers to ensure all aspects of their experiences are centered.

Change the culture

Fostering a safe, respectful, and equitable workplace culture is paramount in preventing gender-based violence and harassment. Employers can help change workplace culture by increasing diversity and advancing policies to foster a more inclusive workplace (such as paid leave). Additionally, employers can proactively create a culture of respect. For example, Women's Bureau grantee SNEAK is implementing an innovative campaign designed to shift the culture of construction which can help prevent gender-based violence and harassment. And OSHA encourages employers through its Safety-Second program to embrace safety and health as a core value, including the incorporation of less traditional health and safety concerns like gender-based violence and harassment, anti-retaliation programs and mental health into their health and safety management systems.

Additional resources

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for preventing gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work, there are a few of the many steps employers can take to create safer and healthier workplaces for all workers. Additionally, OSHA has published resources, such as Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Service Workers. For more information, visit the Women's Bureau and OSHA's website.

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Tags: Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Women's Bureau, working women, workplace safety and health, Workplace Safety, gender-based violence, harassment, workplace violence

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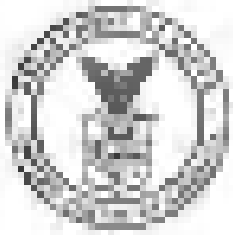

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